A BOOK OF HOURS MADE FOR THE DUKE OF BERRY

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Jean, Duke of Berry, prince of France, was a great collector of beautiful books. He was also a collector of castles, tapestries, goldsmith’s work, and jewels. Unfortunately, of his castles only parts of Rion and Poitiers and the ruins of Bourges and Mehun remain; of his tapestries the sole surviving example is the magnificent set representing the Nine Heroes now at The Cloisters. Practically all of his rich collection of goldsmith’s work was melted down, and most of his jewels were sold to pay the King’s soldiers in the Hundred Years’ War. Luckily books cannot profitably be converted into bullion; they are more easily preserved than tapestries; they do not so quickly go out of style; and they do not take up so much room in attics. Of some three hundred manuscripts known to have been in the Duke of Berry’s library, more than a quarter remain today.

The Cloisters now owns two of the most beautiful of these manuscripts, both of them Books of Hours. Recently in the possession of Baron Maurice de Rothschild of Paris, they were kept from harm during the Nazi occupation of France in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The larger of the two, known as the Belles Heures, is one of the few made to order for the duke by his own painters and illuminators. This fact is included in the inscription on the first page, written with flourishes in the elaborate script of the duke’s secretary, Jean Flamel: “These Hours were made to the order of the very excellent and mighty Prince Jehan, son of the King of France, Duke of Berry and Auvergne, Count of Poitou, Estampes, Boulogne, and Auvergne. Flamel.” Several pages of the manuscript also bear the duke’s coat of arms, the fleurs-de-lis of France in an indented border of red, and his emblems, the bear and the swan; his motto “le temps venra” is included on the calendar page for December.

A portrait of Jean of Berry appears as an illustration for a prayer to the Virgin. He is represented as young, curly-headed, and clean-shaven, clad in a blue cloak with an ermine cape and a chaplet of golden flowers. Apparently his original head covering, a hat or a ducal crown, was changed at a later date for some unknown reason. The portrait of the Duchess of Berry, Jeanne de Boulogne, at prayer before the Trinity, remains untouched. She is golden-haired, blue-gowned, and proud as a queen in her high crown. Presumably the duke is also portrayed among the horsemen approaching a castle in the last miniature of the book, which illustrates the prayer for safety on a journey. French scholars have identified the scarlet-coated figure at the far right, mounted on a white horse, as Jean of Berry, painted at a time when the duke was wearing a moustache and a beard. Recently it has been suggested that
the courtier in blue, riding a dun-colored horse, who has just removed his hat, more nearly resembles other portraits of the duke.

Our manuscript is listed in the Duke of Berry’s inventory, which was begun in 1413, as: “a belles heures, very well and richly illustrated; and at the beginning is the calendar . . . ; and afterwards is illustrated the life and martyrdom of Saint Catherine; and following that are written the four gospels and two prayers to Our Lady; and then begin the hours of Our Lady and following these are several other hours and prayers; and at the beginning of the second folio of these same hours of Our Lady is written: audieritis; covered in scarlet velvet with two gold clasps . . . ; these hours monseigneur had made by his workmen [ouvriers].” Léopold Delisle in 1880 was the first to identify our manuscript with this item in the inventory. Since then there has never been any question that our Book of Hours is the “belles heures” thus described. The placing of “the life and martyrdom of Saint Catherine” immediately after the calendar is most unusual, and audieritis is indeed the first word on the second folio of the hours of Our Lady. At the time of Delisle’s study the manuscript was in the possession of the Ailly family. Hence, the book has been sometimes called the Heures d’Ailly.

The covers of red velvet with their golden clasps have disappeared, but the book remains intact. There are 224 folios with 94 full-page and 54 column illustrations, not to mention the calendar vignettes and border illuminations—a whole gallery of medieval paintings, practically as fresh as the duke’s ouvriers left them when they finished their task and cleaned their brushes five hundred and forty-odd years ago.

It is impossible to describe with words the vibrancy and brilliance of the color schemes in these little paintings. Many of them have the hues of flower bouquets—lilacs, hyacinths, and mallow pinks, with leaf greens, strong dashes of field-poppy vermilion, and always that ineffable borage-blossom blue that the Middle Ages called ultramarine, a pigment so precious that the Duke of Berry listed two pots of it among his “treasures.” In others the colors, keyed to the drab garments of the desert saints, are muted olive greens and rock browns, with vermilion for the Red Sea and small pools reflecting a blue sky. There are compositions in white, such as the scene of Bruno and his companions entering the Grande Chartreuse, where white is as exciting as any color when it is used, as here, with ultramarine blue, varying tones of soft greens, flesh tints, and gold. One of the paintings of the Crucifixion, illustrating the “darkness that came upon the earth from the sixth to the ninth hour,” is done entirely in misty grays, with a streak of flame in the sky. This is one of the rare night scenes in medieval art.

The borders are lavish in gold as if they were settings for jewels. Except for the Annunciation page, which has received a special treatment in the Belles Heures as in many another Book of Hours, they are intricately composed of spiky ivy leaves enlivened now and then with a scarlet and blue dragon or medallions of angels. Lines of beautiful Gothic lettering in black and vermilion or blue and red complete the design. Text, illustration, and border combine to create pages that are truly “illuminated,” that is, “lighted up” and sparkling.

The duke’s ouvriers, besides being expert colorists, were also good story-tellers, as all good illustrators of books should be. They depicted the familiar scenes with an unhackneyed approach and the unfamiliar with imaginative invention. A bugler plays while Christ is nailed to the cross; an angel holds Saint George’s helmet while he slays the dragon, and two baby dragons emerge from the cave; Saint Louis, off for the Crusade, steers his ship between great rocks like Scylla and Charybdis in a stormy sea.

Though most of the illustrations seem to have been intended mainly to give pleasure, many of them are very moving also. In the Flight into
The Annunciation, a page from the Belles Heures, showing strong Italian influence. Small figures of putti, angels, and animals are entwined in the acanthus-leaf border, unlike any other in the manuscript.
Egypt, against a lonely desert background of cruelly sharp rocks, the mother comforts her child with warm enfolding arms, her cheek pressed against his, while in the rear the pagan idols shatter and fall and in the heavens a bright angel points the way to a safer land. In the Pietà the sorrow of the holy people over the death of Christ is almost heart-rending in its restraint. Mary holds the limp arm of her son and bows her head in grief. One of the women tenderly touches Mary’s head and reaches toward her in mute appeal. John puts his hand over his eyes to hide his unwilling tears. The whole group of mourners is magnificently constructed to form a pyramid of sorrow above the dead body of Christ. There are contrasting diagonals in the group at the left and the up-thrusting rock at the right. In the foreground Mary Magdalen prostrates herself in what might be considered an unlovely attitude. But as she anoints the feet of her master for the last time, one’s eyes follow her foreshortened body, and one is thus drawn into the picture not as a spectator but as a participant in the tragedy.

The duke’s ouvriers liked to build compositions on the diagonal, thus creating more dynamic effects than are possible when the designs are based on horizontals and verticals. They also liked figures in movement and painted them in all sorts of postures and attitudes. Their daring foreshortenings are often incorrect, but they are somehow believable. The garments that the people wear sometimes suggest the bodies underneath, but more often they are painted with sheer delight in the textile folds for their own sake. The materials are like supple nun’s-cloth; they swing and swirl in beautiful rhythmic curves. Cloaks and gowns trail the ground the better to show a variety of sinuous drapery patterns.

The illuminators of our manuscript were also aware of the beauty of landscape backgrounds for their stories. Dominant in these landscapes are the craggy rocks which thrust their sharp pinnacles upward into the sky. But there are also quiet blue pools, rushing silver-green rivers, and oceans with tossing waves. The trees, like scrub pines, are for the most part painted according to a single decorative formula, but the exquisitely drawn castles on the sky line are as different as the Duke of Berry’s own châteaux. What is most exciting about these landscapes, however, is the feeling of atmospheric depth. Jean of Berry’s artists knew that objects in the
distance appeared not only smaller in size but
dimmer in outline and bluish in color. They also
observed that a bright azure sky overhead pales
to aquamarine at the horizon. And so when they
chose to represent a sky instead of the conven-
tional patterned backdrop they created a heaven
of infinite space. In the scene of the miracle of
Saint Nicholas they even attempted a clearing
sky after a storm. All of this is taken for granted
today, but in the time of Jean of Berry it was a
new discovery.

The illuminators of our Belles Heures were
also keenly interested in drawing architecture—
castles and chapels and city walls and monastic
buildings, almost all of them in the elegant late
Gothic style of the day. Many of the scenes show
experiments in perspective with unusual asym-
metric views of church vaults, choir stalls, and
tiled floors. The mathematics may not be exact
but the illusion is generally convincing.

Only one little painting shows human beings
subordinated to the landscape. This is a kind of
angel's-eye view of the Grande Chartreuse mon-
astery where tiny monks fish in a pool and an idle
sort of brother sits in his rowboat contemplating
the beauty of the scene.

This is an infinitely varied, excitingly beauti-
ful Book of Hours which the Duke of Berry had
his ouvriers make sometime before the year 1413,
when the inventory recorded it. Since artists of
the Middle Ages only occasionally signed their
work, it is not surprising that the names of the
painters of our Belles Heures do not appear any-
where in the book. And they are not in the in-
ventory or in the secretary's inscription. How-
ever, we are sure that the Belles Heures is of
the same workmanship and in the same style as the
famous Très Riches Heures at Chantilly, which
is listed as follows in the inventory of the Duke
of Berry made after his death in 1416: "in a port-
folio, many sections [cahiers] of a very rich Hours
which Pol and his brothers made, very richly
illustrated and illuminated."

Pol and his brothers, Jean (or Janequin) and
Herman, called Limbourg, were among the
most favored enlumineurs of the duke. Bits of in-
formation about them have been culled from
inventory items, expense accounts, and registries
of France and the Netherlands. Unfortunately,
large sections of the account books of the Duke
of Berry are lost, and we do not know in what
year Pol and his brothers started to work at the
ducal court. However, an item in the inventory
of 1413 describes a present that the three brothers
The Nativity, showing the border usual in this manuscript. The parchment pages measure 9 3/8 x 6 3/8 inches
gave to their patron as a joke in the year 1410, “an imitation book made of one piece of wood, painted in the semblance of a book in which there are no leaves, or anything written.” It would seem that the brothers, so well entrenched in the favor of the duke as to dare to play a trick on him in 1410, must have known him for a long time before.

In 1413 Berry’s accounts register payments to Pol de Limbourg of six crowns (écus) on October 24, ten crowns on November 7, and on November 9 fifty crowns “for consideration of the good and agreeable services which [Pol] gave to Monseigneur every day.” The duke also showed his appreciation of the Limbourg brothers by gifts of gems. In his will he bequeathed them a valuable jewel worth a king’s ransom, namely “a small fine ruby in the shape of a grain of barley, set in a ring which Monseigneur bought... for the price and sum of 3000 crowns of gold; and it is called the Barley Grain.” The Duke of Berry must have been well pleased with his enlumineurs of Limbourg.

Information on the earlier career of the Limbourg brothers is obtained from the records of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, brother of Jean of Berry. An entry for the year 1402-1403 shows that Pol and Janequin had just been engaged by Philip to “illustrate a very beautiful and very notable Bible.” They were not to “hire themselves” to any other seigneur for four years but were to devote their time wholly to the above mentioned Bible, “so that it could be made and completed the better and as quickly as possible.” For this they were to receive “for their labor and their living, as well as for other necessities the sum of twenty Parisian sous for the two of them for each day that they worked.” Since Philip died in 1404 it is probable that this Bible was not completed in his lifetime.

An item in the accounts of Burgundy for an earlier year (1401-1402) states that Janequin and Herman were at that time “young children” working in Paris for a goldsmith. It seems that they were on their way home to “the country of Gelder, where they were born,” when they were taken prisoner in Brussels. The Duke of Burgundy paid their ransom because they were “nephews of Jehan Manuel [Malouel], painter and valet de chambre” to the duke, who had always rendered “good and agreeable service every day in times past, and, it was hoped, would continue to do so in the time to come.”

This is the earliest mention of the brothers. The last is a document discovered in Holland within the last few years which states that in 1416 the property of Pol and Janequin and Herman at Bourges was claimed by their heirs. This implies that all three brothers had recently died, probably of an epidemic, in the same year as their great patron, Jean, Duke of Berry.

The known facts concerning Pol and Herman and Janequin may be meager, but they are pertinent. The “country of Gelder” in the Duchy of Limbourg (now Belgium), “where they were born,” produced many great artists of the period, including the even more famous brothers van Eyck. It is perhaps not by chance that both sets of brothers painted as backgrounds beautiful, luminous landscapes.

Two of the Limbourg brothers received training in Paris under a goldsmith. All three worked there at some time as illuminators of manuscripts, for Guillebert of Metz in listing the famous artists of Paris includes the “trois frères enlumineurs,” who were undoubtedly the three Limbourg brothers. Paris, at the time—as in many another time—was a magnet for artists from all lands, from England, Germany, Italy, and especially from the Low Countries. Here
LEFT: The Court of Heaven, page from a Paris manuscript of the Golden Legend (Bibl. Nat. Fr. 414) which, according to M. Porcher, is dated 1405.

RIGHT: The same scene from the Belles Heures, showing similar composition, iconography, and border patterns. The influence of the Paris model is obvious.

A later Court of Heaven, illustrated opposite, from the Rohan Book of Hours (Bibl. Nat. Lat. 9471), borrowed in turn from the Belles Heures.
there was a long tradition of fine art, an art of elegance, refinement, gentleness, and grace. Parisian illuminated manuscripts were famous all over Europe, and the workshops were flourishing. The Limbourgs owed much to their Parisian associations.

At the court of the Duke of Burgundy in Dijon Pol and his brothers must have seen the recently completed work by artists from their own Netherlands, such as the touchingly beautiful Pietà created for Philip of Burgundy, attributed to their uncle, Jean Malouel, and now in the Louvre, and the celebrated outer wings of an altarpiece by Melchior Broederlam, with scenes of the Annunciation, Visitation, Presentation, and Flight, which is still at Dijon. The influence of such paintings as these can be seen in the Belles Heures.

Then, at last, under the patronage of Jean of Berry, the three brothers were to become well acquainted with the duke’s great collection of art, his castles and manuscripts, his goldsmith’s work and his tapestries. They even painted portraits of some of his treasures. His castles are exquisitely drawn in the backgrounds of the Très Riches Heures, though they are merely suggested in the Belles Heures. However, in our manuscript the representation of Heraclius on one of the duke’s Italian medals is repeated almost line by line in the miniature representing the emperor bringing back the True Cross to Jerusalem. What is of special interest to us is the similarity between the Saint Charlemagne in the Belles Heures and the figures of the Nine Heroes in the Duke of Berry’s tapestries now at The Cloisters. In the manuscript Charlemagne is shown seated on a massive throne, sword held upright on his armored knee. The composition and the pose duplicate almost exactly the figures of the Heroes. No other saint in the Belles Heures is depicted in a similar attitude. It seems probable that the Limbourg brothers, when confronted with the need to represent Charlemagne, turned for a model to the Charlemagne in the tapestry. Since Charlemagne is one of the Heroes missing from the Cloisters set it is pleasant to think that we may have in the miniature a likeness of one of the lost sections of the Nine Heroes.

In the court of the Duke of Berry or at an earlier date in Paris or Dijon, Pol de Limbourg and his brothers, like most of their fellow artists in the north, became entranced with Italian art. There are many evidences of this in our Belles Heures. There are the barren rocks found in almost all Italian paintings of the fourteenth century, there are figures such as the kneeling Magdalen in the Pietà, as Giotto-like as any Giottesque in Italy. In the Nativity the shepherds come close to the manger as in Italian iconography, and Joseph sits with his head in his hand. In the Annunciation the Virgin crosses her hands on her breast in a gesture derived from Italian prototypes, and Gabriel carries the sheaf of lilies which northern artists usually represent as a bouquet in a vase. The border of this page is distinctly Italian also with its acanthus scrolls and its tiny putti. This border has been compared with a sculptured doorway of the cathedral of Florence and the conclusion has been reached that one of the brothers must have traveled to Italy before the Belles Heures was painted. However, it is equally possible that a model for this border could have existed in France. The Duke of Berry, according to his inventories, owned several Italian manuscripts as well as other Italian works of art. He also employed, as a kind of librarian, an Italian enlumineur named Peter of Verona.

The above paragraphs merely suggest the various currents which helped to shape the cosmopolitan art of Pol, Herman, and Janequin of Limbourg, for it is impossible to delineate the antecedents of an artist with the exactness of a family tree. In our Belles Heures the three broth-
The Emperor Heraclius returning the True Cross to Jerusalem, from the Belles Heures; and a cast of the Duke of Berry's medal of Heraclius (Bibliothèque Nationale), from which the miniature must have been copied.

Charlemagne (center) as a royal saint in the Belles Heures, and Alexander and Caesar from the Nine Heroes Tapestries at The Cloisters. These tapestries once belonged to the Duke of Berry, and the now missing Charlemagne of the tapestries was perhaps the model for the painted figure in the duke's Book of Hours.
The Très Riches Heures, which bears the name of Pol and his brothers in the inventory, is several years later than our Belles Heures. Our book was finished and bound before the inventory of 1413; the Chantilly Hours was unfinished at the time of Berry’s death in 1416. It is interesting to compare the two and note the trend of the Limbourg style.

The most tremendous development is evident in the calendar scenes. Instead of the traditional vignettes in the Belles Heures which represent the occupations of the months, whole pages in the Très Riches Heures are devoted to scenes of medieval life. Not only the calendar pictures but many others show that the Limbourgs had made great strides in the painting of castles and towns, fields and rivers and hills. They improved on the “darkness” scene of the Crucifixion and added an even more superb night picture of the Garden of Gethsemane.

In representing many of the old familiar scenes, however, the Limbourg brothers seem to be at their best in our Belles Heures. This is evident in a comparison of two paintings of the Descent from the Cross, one from the Belles Heures and the other from the Très Riches Heures. The latter is larger, but the composition is not more monumental; it is merely filled with extra people, richly clothed in patterned garments. The little boys and the lovely ladies add to the picturesqueness of the painting, but they are intrusions on a solemn scene. And the utter pathos of the mother gazing directly into the face of her son has been dissipated by distance.

In the scene of the shepherds also one notes that in the later manuscript several angels have been added, one shepherd, a larger castle on the sky line, and many more sheep. The shepherds have shabby garments because the Limbourg brothers had learned that shepherds are poor; the trees have lost their leaves because the brothers remembered that the Nativity took

**ABOVE:** The Descent from the Cross, from the Belles Heures. **BELOW:** A later version of the scene, also by the Limbourg brothers, from the Très Riches Heures.
place in the wintertime. These are all decorative additions and delightful innovations, but the earlier interpretation by its simple directness has greater dramatic impact. No wonder that the shepherds are dazzled by the angels, for the heavenly host have come so close to earth that one could reach up and touch their bright garments. No wonder that the lowly shepherds seem to be the heroes of the story, for they are bigger than their hills.

Besides the 156 pages of paintings in the Belles Heures and the seventy-one pictures in the Très Riches Heures, the Limbourgs also painted for the Duke of Berry at least two pages in the section of the Très Belles Heures which disappeared during the last war, and a page in the so-called Petites Heures in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Lat. 18014) representing another version of the Duke of Berry on a journey.

They also painted the first twenty-four folios of the Bible Historiée (Bibl. Nat. Fr. 166). This is believed by many scholars to be the Bible mentioned earlier which the Limbourg brothers were called upon in 1402 to illustrate for Philip, Duke of Burgundy. A Book of Prayers in Brussels (Bibl. Royale 11035-37), which was commissioned by Philip of Burgundy, contains one page in the Limbourg style, a beautiful Virgin and Child on a crescent moon. This theme was repeated with variations in our Belles Heures.

Several pages in a Book of Hours owned by Count Seilern of London are late works by the Limbourg brothers or their workshop, two of the miniatures being close copies of two pictures in our manuscript.

Our Belles Heures remains the only complete book from the hand of the Limbourgs. The value that the executors put on it at the death of the Duke of Berry in 1416 was 875 pounds in Tours money, whereas the unfinished Très Riches Heures was estimated at 500 pounds.

The Belles Heures was bought by Yolande of Aragon, who was the wife of Berry’s nephew, Louis II of Anjou, King of Sicily. The account of the transaction is of considerable interest to all who purchase works of art. First “the noble and powerful lady, the Queen of Sicily sent to the seigneurs executors to ask for and fetch to her these Hours. And the seigneurs executors sent these same Hours for her to see and to keep if it so pleased her after paying the said sum of 700 Paris pounds [875 Tours pounds] or any other sum of money that seemed right to her. The queen, after having for a long time viewed and examined these Hours, kept them and paid to the executors the sum of only 300 Tours pounds.” The lady was a clever bargainer, but she must have been assisted by her “master and husband,” who was the principal executor of his uncle’s estate.

Afterwards, at the court of Anjou and elsewhere our Belles Heures was undoubtedly “viewed and examined” many times by appreciative people, for it was evidently used as a model for several other beautiful Hours.